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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TALLINN 001131

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SUBJECT: ESTONIA: PRIME MINISTER ANSIP VISITS AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: CDA Jeff Goldstein for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a visit to Afghanistan December 10-12, Prime Minister Ansip assured President Karzai that Estonia and NATO are in Afghanistan for the "long haul." Karzai expressed gratitude for Estonia's support to Afghanistan and complained bitterly about Pakistan's unwillingness to deal with the Taliban. Foreign Minister Farhang expressed strong reservations about the French proposal to form a "Contact Group" for Afghanistan, reservations that the Estonians share. Ansip visited Estonian troops based in Helmand Province who reported good cooperation on the ground with British forces leading the PRT. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Prime Minister Andrus Ansip traveled to Afghanistan December 10-12 to visit with Estonian troops serving in the UK-led PRT in Helmand Province. The Prime Minister also met with President Hamid Karzai, Minister of Economy M. Amin Farhang and Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament, Yunus Qanon. Ansip was accompanied by newly-appointed Chief of the Defense Forces (CHOD) Major General Ants Laaneots, Ministry of Defense (MOD) Permanent U/S Lauri Almann, Ansip's Foreign Affairs Advisor Kyllike Sillaste-Elling, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director for Security and Arms Control Arti Hilpus. Following the visit, Sillaste-Elling and Hilpus (separately) briefed Poloffs on their impressions of the trip.

¶3. (C) In Kabul, Ansip met with President Karzai, who was accompanied by the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs. According to Sillaste-Elling, Karzai was very well prepared for his discussions with Ansip - it was clear the GOA had "really done its homework." Karzai expressed gratitude for the international support Afghanistan is receiving, and noted his particular appreciation for help from countries like Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia who have "not been independent very long and don't have to be in Afghanistan." Karzai thanked Ansip for Estonia's development assistance, the GOE's donation of 4000 Kalashnikov rifles to Afghan security forces and for the 130 Estonian troops who are participating in the UK-led PRT in Helmand.

¶4. (C) Ansip assured Karzai that Estonia and NATO are in Afghanistan for the "long haul." He said that Estonians recognize that Afghanistan's struggle against the Soviet Union contributed to the USSR's collapse. After re-independence, Estonia received a lot of support from other countries. Estonia's presence in Afghanistan is an effort to repay that support. On reconstruction, Ansip advised Karzai that, based on Estonia's own experience, it is necessary to pay attention to rule of law and corruption

issues in order to attract foreign investment.

15. (C) Both Sillaste-Elling and Hilpus commented on Karzai's rancor toward Pakistan. Karzai told Ansip that he believes the GOP is not really interested in cooperation with Afghanistan. Rather, Pakistan wants to benefit from Afghanistan's current weak state. Karzai said Afghanistan has a "clear idea and clear goals" but Pakistan does not really want to do anything to stop the extremists roaming within its borders. Hilpus remarked on how surprised he was by the "bitterness and anger in Karzai's voice" when he spoke about Pakistan.

16. (C) On the issue of NATO-EU cooperation in Afghanistan, Sillaste-Elling said that that she believes things are working fine on the ground. The donor community in Afghanistan is small enough that "everyone talks to each other," despite ongoing coordination issues in Brussels. These coordination problems, however, are problematic for the GOE in terms of managing their own limited resources, Sillaste-Elling added. She also expressed concern that the drop in the European Commission's budget for Afghanistan next year sends a bad signal about EU priorities.

17. (C) In a separate meeting with Ansip, Economic Minister Farhang expressed GOA concerns about French President Jacques Chirac's proposal for a Contact Group (similar to the one in Bosnia) for Afghanistan. Farhang pointed out that in Bosnia, the Contact Group was created in the absence of a government. According to Hilpus, Farhang repeatedly asked what the GOA's role would be with the Contact Group and why the GOA was not consulted before the proposal was announced. Hilpus told us that the GOE

TALLINN 00001131 002 OF 002

believes Chirac's proposal is premature at best, that it is not clear it would enhance the reconstruction and development work going on now, and that Ansip shares many of the same concerns as Farhang. Additionally Hilpus confided that that he found the manner in which the Contact Group was announced "insulting to the Afghan government."

18. (C) In Helmand, the GOE delegation received briefings from both civilian and military officials and visited a children's hospital where Estonia plans to donate medical equipment as part of its first development assistance project in Afghanistan. Ansip and General Lanneots were both impressed with the professionalism and high morale of the Estonian troops. Hilpus said that while information sharing between the Estonian and British forces is good, Estonian troops did complain that they are not receiving timely intelligence from UK forces. The British commanders on the ground characterized the Estonian platoon as an asset to the mission.

19. (C) Sillaste-Elling noted that there had been "some problems" for the previous Estonian rotation (that had deployed in the spring). Everyone had been surprised at the level of violence they encountered and the British had had to "get a grip." Since then, however, the British forces have changed tactics - making their units more mobile - which has improved their ability to react to Taliban activity. The British have also made progress identifying key Taliban figures and distinguishing them from less hard-core supporters. The goal, Sillaste-Elling said, is "not to create any more enemies."

110. (C) Both Sillaste-Elling and Hilpus reported that Ansip was very pleased with the trip. The Prime Minister had accomplished all of his goals - the most important of which was to demonstrate strong support for the troops. Sillaste-Elling noted that while this type of public support comes naturally in other countries, this has not always been the case for Estonia. In the past, the public perception has been that once the Government approves a deployment, everyone "just forgets about the troops." She

said Ansip was very happy that he has been able to visit  
both Iraq and Afghanistan.  
GOLDSTEIN